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ABSTRACT

This survey was undertaken to gather accurate and reliable information on private and government-supported day care centers within Italy, and to compare such data to currently available government statistics. A questionnaire was drawn up and sent to the 21 regions of Italy to examine: (1) the number of centers in each region and the number of children attending each center; (2) the number and type of staff at day care centers; and (3) the management and organization of day care centers. It was found that some regions had many more day care centers than are recorded in government statistics, that the provision for children varies considerably from region to region, and that day care centers in northern and central Italy tend to provide their staff with more training and refresher courses than centers in southern Italy. It was also discovered that some regions that already have a low ability to satisfy potential day care demand were actually converting some day care center structures to other uses. (MDM)

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Public infant centres in Italy: a national survey

Public day-care centres have existed in Italy since 1971 (Law 1044, 6 December 1971): they are run by townships and funded by the State, by the Regions, by the townships themselves and by the families of the children who use them. A day care centre is a social service with educational aims, which caters for children from the early months of life up to 36 months; it is organized in sections, usually divided into infants (3-12 months), young toddlers (12-24 months), and toddlers (24-36 months), but the age ranges vary from place to place and from year to year. The number of children in each section is also variable, and is lowest in the infant section. Further remarks on the ratio between the number of children and the number of care givers are made below.

The law which set up the centres was in response to pressure from women's organizations and the unions, and was supported by the Left-wing parties. The 1970s were a period of great change in Italian society: the job-market provided enormous opportunities for women, and the nuclear family could no longer count on the support of domestic resources (grandparents and other relatives) in caring for children; furthermore the political and social awareness of women was growing and they no longer just sought more autonomy for themselves - in this period the divorce law was passed and a little later abortion was permitted - but also demanded educational care and not just the minding of their little children, who since 1968 (Law 444, 18 March 1968) had been admitted in ever growing numbers to public nursery schools. In this climate of women's liberation and of their more active political role, and as the welfare state became more established, the day care centre seemed to be a situation in which not just small children, but also adults might acquire new social identities, that were less traditional and private. Indeed in the child group in the day care centre it is hoped that the children can be taught richer social behaviour than is possible in the family, and in the care givers' meetings and the management committees (to which by law organizational responsibilities and educational decision-making are delegated) it is hoped that care givers, parents and political representatives of the community may grow. These are the actual, and ideological premisses to which the Italian public day care centre has only in part been able to keep faith.

Initially the funding for day care centres was drawn from the National Insurance contributions which employers had to pay to the National pension fund (0.10%) and from a contribution of 70 billion lire directly paid out of state funds, as well as from the fees paid by the families that sent their children to the centres. These State funds were paid to the Regions who redistributed them to the townships on the basis of their requests for funding and the number of centres in operation. Since 1989 this public sector

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funding is no longer tied to the day care centres and can be used by the townships to finance other services.

During the 1970s the State projected that 3800 day care centres should be opened in the period 1972-77, but this plan was never fully completed. Indeed at the time of our survey (1990) and taking into account the day care centres of the former *Opera Nazionale MaternitÖ e Infanzia* (ONMI), set up under fascism - which were also considered since in 1975 they were taken over by the townships - the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) gives a total of 1946 centres. If we compare this figure with the demand, it may be seen that while the number of applications has increased the availability of places has not increased.

Table 1. Percentage of places vs. applications for admission

Year	
1984	95.2
1985	92.8
1986	91.3
1987	83.5
1988	89.7

Source: ISTAT, 1990

These data are all the more worrying in as much as the job-market is absorbing more and more women: indeed whereas in 1980 female employment (members of the workforce per 100 inhabitants) was 26%, in 1989 the figure was 30.3%. Most of these are young women, often mothers, for most of whom the day care centre is the only resource for the care and education of their little children.

1. A national survey

The investigation of the present situation of day care centres in Italy is a complex problem: indeed institutional responsibility for the centre is divided between the State (which passes the laws that establish the centre, defines its aims and provides the majority of the funds to the Regions via the Health Ministry), the Regions (which also pass laws concerning the organization of the centre in their territory) and the townships which organize and run the service on the ground. Quantative data are thus dispersed in the same way as responsibility regarding the centre, the sources are heterogeneous and the criteria adopted by the various bodies (Health Ministry, Regions and Townships) are different and often partial.

It should further be noted that the body that is responsible for day care centres in the various Regions and townships may differ: the *Assessorato* for Social Security, for Assistance and Social Services or for Education. Moreover it is the Region and not the State which makes the political decisions concerning the basic planning for the centres.

There are only two official bodies which systematically gather information concerning day care centres, with however differing criteria: the ISTAT and the Health Ministry.

The ISTAT has followed the development of the centre from year to year since 1974, processing the data obtained from questionnaires sent to each centre via the provincial Chambers of Commerce. The Ministry, on the other hand, is in contact with the Regional *Assessorati* which organize the centres, and in 1987 organized a survey on the evolution of the centres from 1983 to 1986.

However if the data provided by ISTAT are compared with those of the Health Ministry some discrepancies may be noted. For example, according to the ISTAT, the number of centres in operation is 1064, compared with 2122 in the ministerial survey, for a total of 92,226 places (compared with 100,723).

These discrepancies are mostly to be explained by the difference in the primary sources (Regional *Assessorati* in the case of the Health Ministry and the individual centres in the case of the ISTAT survey) but they are also due to the different criteria adopted. The ISTAT data, although influenced by an approach which sees the day care centres as social provisions to be compared to Shelters for the homeless, Children's Summer Camps and Institutions for the Handicapped, provide information concerning the number of centres, public and private, in each province, the number of children divided by sex, and their attendance rates. The ministerial survey concentrates on basic parameters for each region: the number of centres, in operation or not (classified as those still under construction and those finished), the total number of places and the total number of children registered in the public and private sector centres, as a whole (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison between the ISTAT and Health Ministry data for 1986

Region	ISTAT	Health Ministry
Piedmont	219	246
Valle d'Aosta	6	5
Lombardy	439	439
Bolzano	5	6
Trento	21	20
Veneto	97	121
Friuli - V. Giulia	22	25
Liguria	58	67
Emilia Romagna	325	336
Tuscany	151	176
Umbria	44	54
Marche	81	84
Latium	185	176
Abruzzo	43	58
Molise	4	4
Campania	31	35
Apulia	104	102
Basilicata	18	29
Calabria	20	27
Sicily	55	70
Sardinia	36	42
Total	1964	2083

2. Development of unambiguous survey criteria

The marked differences found in the data relative to 1986 provided by the above two sources underline the urgent need for a regular survey, to be carried out by a single body or by bodies adopting the same criteria nationwide.

The survey carried out by the Chair of Pedagogy of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Pavia, together with the Health Ministry, was begun in 1989; it was designed so that the results would be comparable with the ISTAT data for 1987, published in 1990. Its findings reiterate the impact of survey criteria on data and lay the foundation for an accurate and unified periodic check-up of the day care centre situation.

For this purpose a questionnaire was drawn up, thanks to help from experts in the field and Administrative staff from Regional Authorities. It was divided into 3 sections.

1) The first section elicited information on the distribution of centres locally, namely the number of centres operated by public sector or private bodies in operation, to be opened in the near future, or built but not in operation, and the number of places available, the children attending the public and private sectors and the ratio between care givers and children registered.

2) The second section sought data concerning the staff of the centres, the number of care givers, the auxiliary staff and coordinators present in the public and/or private centres and their duties, and concerning relations with health provisions.

3) The third section sought information concerning the management and organization of the centre, namely waiting lists, criteria for admission priority, timetables, refresher courses, Regional expenditure on construction and management, and on the development plans drawn up by each Region.

The questionnaire was distributed to the relevant Regional *Assessorati* in April 1989, and respected the division by province followed by the ISTAT. It was accompanied by a dossier on the data in the possession of the Ministry concerning use of the centre and a list of Regional laws passed over the last 20 years, in order to encourage an immediate exchange of information with the Regions.

3. Survey Results

In July 1990, more than a year after the despatch of the questionnaires, only 18, of the 21 sent to the Regions, had been returned fully completed. Two Regions - Latium and Calabria - had not completed all the parts of the questionnaire, and some data was still unavailable for Sicily. Furthermore these Regions were unable to provide information concerning private day care centres.

The data gathered lead to a number of observations which may be summarized in four points.

1) The data reported to a certain extent differ from those reported by the ISTAT for 1987. Only Molise and Apulia declared a figure for the number of public day care centres that was lower than that recorded by the ISTAT (1 less for Molise and 6 less for Apulia), the Valle d'Aosta declared the same number of centres, while all the other Regions which completed the questionnaire declared a higher number of centres than was found by the ISTAT survey relative to the same year (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Number of public day care centres according to the present survey and according to ISTAT data

Region	Present survey	ISTAT
Piedmont	230	206
Valle d'Aosta	5	5
Lombardy	438	422
Bolzano	6	5
Trento	20	20
Veneto	121	109
Friuli - V. Giulia	25	21
Liguria	69	57
Emilia Romagna	338	333
Tuscany	176	152
Umbria	55	46
Marche	89	81
Latium	182	169
Abruzzo	55	46
Molise	5	6
Campania	41	31
Apulia	103	109
Basilicata	30	17
Calabria	n.a.	16
Sicily	78	59
Sardinia	42	36

A similar situation was obviously found for the number of places available: only Molise declared a lower number of places available than found in the ISTAT data (cf. Table 4).

Table 4. Number of places available according to the present survey and according to ISTAT data

Region	Present survey	ISTAT
Piedmont	12849	10772
Valle d'Aosta	150	148
Lombardy	20313	18871
Bolzano	497	316
Trento	970	960
Veneto	5976	5284
Friuli - V. Giulia	1154	955
Liguria	2901	2138
Emilia Romagna	16280	15441
Tuscany	6723	6045
Umbria	2130	1547
Marche	3279	2987
Latium	n.a.	9178
Abruzzo	1924	1795
Molise	198	230
Campania	2321	1814
Apulia	5911	5753
Basilicata	1183	733
Calabria	n.a.	742

Sicily	4135	2854
Sardinia	2004	1553

In general it seems from the findings of our questionnaire that some Regions have many more day care centres than are recorded in the ISTAT data. It is not easy to explain this discrepancy, but it should be remembered that the survey criteria adopted are different and that the bodies that organized the two surveys have different responsibilities. While one survey was organized by the ISTAT, a body whose role is limited to the collection and statistical analysis of data, the other was organized by the University of Pavia and the Health Ministry. The role of the University may be seen as limited to research, but the same is not true of the Ministry which provides funding. Indeed it was for this reason that one of the aims of the research programme was to show up these differences and to highlight some parameters which might be useful for monitoring the provision on a nationwide scale.

b) Analysis of the data reported by the 19 Italian Regions which replied completely to the questionnaire provides a picture of provision for the 0-3 years age range: it is extremely uneven. For example if the relationship between the population of this age according to the ISTAT figures for 1988 is compared to the number of places available in the day care centres in operation (cf. Table 5), it may be seen that the ability to satisfy potential demand varies from Region to Region.

Table 5. Percentage provision by Region*

Region	% Provision
Piedmont	9.7
Valle d'Aosta	4.1
Lombardy	9.7
Bolzano	2.5
Trento	5.8
Veneto	3.9
Friuli - V. Giulia	3.4
Liguria	6.6
Emilia Romagna	15.6
Tuscany	6.4
Umbria	7.9
Marche	6.7
Abruzzo	5.6
Molise	1.3
Campania	0.7
Apulia	2.8
Basilicata	3.8
Sicily	1.4
Sardinia	2.7

* Data for Latium and Calabria, which are partial and not comparable with the other Regions, are not reported.

There are some Regions of North and Central Italy, in particular Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, Lombardy, Umbria, Liguria and Tuscany, which provide for more than 5% of the children in the age range, whereas the other Regions are below the 5% limit and in the South, where the situation is worse, Campania provides for only 0.7%. Despite this, as may be seen from Table 6, in the South there are very few day care centres under construction (apart from Apulia which reports 154 centres under construction), and even fewer buildings close to opening, while there is a very high number of centres that are unused, or converted to other uses.

Table 6. Distribution of the centres: summary data

Region	% centres ex-ONMI	opening soon	under constr	unused	other uses
Piedmont	15.2	0	0	70	24
Valle d'Aosta	2	2	0	0	1
Lombardy	21	0	0	12	20
Bolzano	66.6	1	0	0	0
Trento	15	0	0	0	2
Veneto	20.6	1	3	10	25
Friuli - V.G.	32	0	8	8	2
Liguria	27.7	2	11	9	4
Emilia Romagna	13.3	1	2	0	0
Tuscany	17.9	4	6	1	2
Umbria	14.5	0	1	0	22
Marche	24.7	0	11	5	9
Abruzzo	32.7	0	15	8	1
Molise	0	0	2	4	0
Campania	41.4	3	0	43	46
Apulia	39.8	4	154	20	33
Basilicata	40	5	39	16	5
Sicily	43.5	33	79	167	28
Sardinia	38	5	16	20	7

It should also be borne in mind that according to the data collected, Law 1044, 1971, had very little impact, particularly in the South, since high percentages of the former ONMI centres are still in operation.

c) Other data relative to the second section of the questionnaire may be of use in understanding the different types of centre provided by each Italian Region. The in-depth study of a professional role, that of the coordinator responsible for a day care centre, and the types of activity carried out in different situations, help us to gain a better understanding of the centres. In Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria the coordinators have educational duties and in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany they are often graduates. In the other Regions they mostly have management roles; in some Regions they are care givers who rotate in the job (Veneto, Marche, and, in some instances, also in Lombardy). In Basilicata there is

no coordinator. This data may be compared to information concerning refresher courses. In Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Bolzano and Trento, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria, the Region has for years organized or planned and financed (as in Emilia Romagna) refresher courses which ensure the in-service training of the care givers and auxiliary staff, while in Veneto, Friuli - Venezia Giulia and Campania courses have only very recently been set up. In Veneto they were begun by Regional Council deliberation n°3446, 24 June 1986; Friuli - Venezia Giulia had funded refresher programmes organized by individual townships in the years preceding the survey, while from the academic year 1989-90 it was the Region that organized in-service training for staff; Campania has organized courses for staff from 1988 as a result of Regional Council deliberation n°420, 29 July 1988. The other Regions that replied to the questionnaire (Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia - this latter Region must be included in this category as it only provided information concerning a refresher course organized by the township of Cagliari in 1984) do not finance or organize courses for staff. Those Regions which have concretely promoted the development of the coordinator figure with primarily educational functions or have set up refresher courses for staff in the belief that these are essential for the quality of the service which is offered to the community, are again concentrated in the North and Centre of Italy. A vision of a more flexible centre, open between 8 and 11 hours, but which is also more aware of the needs of its staff and able to support them thanks to coordination and in-service training, seems on the whole to be dominant in the North and Centre. It is no accident that it is in these Regions (for example Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria) that there have been numerous cultural initiatives over the last 10 years (Regional conferences, Conference-workshops for staff, Research seminars on new types of centre for the 0-3 years age range, surveys organized by the Region on the use and quality of the centre) which have involved staff and experts and have contributed to ensure a different relationship between the centre and the catchment area. Other regions (for example Friuli - Venezia Giulia and Campania) are beginning to launch initiatives of this sort, but many have still provided no relevant information. Finally it should be noted that generally these same Regions of North and Central Italy which have for years organized courses for staff, have also long begun periodic surveys of the situation on the ground in order to have better information concerning the centres and to respond better to demand.

d) Another objective of the questionnaire was to establish a complete picture of the funds made available by the Regions in 4 sample years (1975, 1980, 1985, and 1987), both for construction or reconstruction and for the running of the day care centres, in order to compare these figures with the funding provided by the Health Ministry. Unfortunately not all the Regions provided complete replies, and the data are not wholly comparable (cf. Table

7).

Table 7. Regional funding in 1987

Region	Funding	
	Building work	Running costs
Piedmont		
Valle d'Aosta		
Lombardy		
Bolzano		
Trento*		
Veneto		
Friuli - V.G.		
Liguria		
Emilia Romagna**		
Tuscany		
Umbria		
Marche		
Abruzzo		
Molise		
Campania		
Apulia		
Basilicata		
Calabria		
Sardinia		

* Over a three year period

** In 1987 as well as the figure indicated, Emilia Romagna spent an annual contribution of 6% or 9% for 20 or 30 years for construction, equivalent to ---------; ------- should be added to the figure reported above for Running costs, spent on contract research promoted by the Region.

Table 8. Regional expenditure compared to State funding in 1987

Region	Global Regional Expenditure	State Funding
Piedmont		
Valle d'Aosta		
Lombardy		
Bolzano		
Trento*		
Veneto		
Friuli - V.G.		
Liguria		
Emilia Romagna**		
Tuscany		
Umbria		
Marche		
Abruzzo		
Molise		
Campania		

Apulia
Basilicata
Calabria
Sardinia

* and ** see table 7.

On the whole the regions of Central and Northern Italy, except for Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, spent more on construction in previous years, and in 1985 and 1987 markedly increased expenditure on running costs, whereas in 1987 the Regions of South Italy were still spending large sums on building work, sometimes more than on running costs (eg. Campania).

To this effect it is certainly interesting to analyze the comprehensive expenditure by each Region compared with the state funding received (cf. Table 8).

From these data it may be seen that in each Region the provision of day care centres has increased at a differing speed and following different models. The provision is variable and it is difficult to identify its form, so that there is no sign of a policy for childhood which carries out satisfactory concrete initiatives on a nationwide scale.

It is not easy to explain this unevenness, since it has historical, cultural and social roots, but it would be a good thing to make an annual survey which at least was able to report on the situation. Such an investigation is all the more necessary since the present survey was unable to obtain complete data on three Regions of Italy (Latium, Calabria, Sicily).

4. Regional Legislation

The global picture of the distribution of day care centres in Italy shows up inequalities and irrational policy decisions. The fact that Regions which have a very low ability to satisfy potential demand (eg. Campania, but also Apulia) should have decided to convert to other uses structures which already existed and were financed by a law (n°1044, 1971) which provided funds solely for the construction of day care centres, is to be put down to a lack of intelligent political planning. The fact that Regions like Emilia Romagna, which provides for 15.65% of the resident population in the age range, had no structures that had been converted to other uses, at least in the year in which the present survey was carried out, may be put down to a high political awareness.

Along with the irrational administration of provision for early infancy practiced by some Regions it is worth noting that there are some Regions, namely Veneto (Regional Law n°49, 6 September 1983) and Sardinia (Regional Law n°44, 27 June 1986), which have for years constructed buildings that are to be used as day care centres and then use them for other purposes as a result of Regional laws.

In order to understand the underlying motives for such

choices, which damage both the quantity and the quality of the services provided, it was decided to analyze Regional legislation along with the basic laws passed concerning day care centres by the Italian Government over the last 20 years. Some central and recurrent parameters were emphasized: the aims of the centre, the criteria which determine the structure of the building which is destined for use as a centre and the adult-child ratio, career structure and level, the role which the staff are asked to fill and their training, and the patterns of organization of the centre. These laws must be analyzed in the light of the laws passed by the Italian Government, discussed above and below (Law n°1044, 6 December 1971; Law n°891, 21 November 1977; Law n°131, 24 June 1983; and Law n°40, 1 February 1989).

Over the last 20 years the *aims* of the centre have been and are still variable from Region to Region. Some Regions (such as Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria) have reflected since the early 1970s on the type and quality of service provided, and immediately decided to emphasize the formative and educational significance of the day care centre. On the other hand there are other situations in Italy (above all the South and the Islands) which have not been able or not wanted to move away from simple assistance. Although in many regions (Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and Latium) there is an attempt to emphasize the educational value of the centre and to contribute to the formation of the staff via in-service training, other situations seem still to be linked to purely assistential role for the staff.

The Regions have not even established uniform norms for the adult-child ratio (these vary from 1:5 for infants and 1:7 for young toddlers and toddlers, laid down by Emilia Romagna, to the generalized 1:10 ratio in Campania).

As far as regards *patterns of organization*, in some Regions (namely Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Latium, Abruzzo, Campania and Sicily) the management committees are at present made up of representatives of the town council, the unions present in the catchment area, the families and the staff. The duties of these committees are financial planning, the formulation of the internal regulation, and the development of the basic educational programme of the centre. in the other Regions (for example, Piedmont, Friuli - Venezia Giulia, Marche, Molise, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Trento and Bolzano) there is no mention of the involvement of society or of the development of the basic educational programme in current legislation.

The *criteria by which funding is allocated to the townships* also varies markedly from Region to Region. Some Regions (for example, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Trento Province, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria) have provided funding from the early 1970s, whilst others (for example Abruzzo and Molise) approved their plan and allocated funds in 1976, when many day care centres,

according to the National Legislation, should already have been operating.

It is not possible to put this extremely varied panorama of policies for infancy into a unified picture, and it is only possible to read, here and there, together with traces of a policy of assistance which is left over from the past, signs of renewal and to integrate this information with the data gathered relating to 1987. It should also be emphasized that today this provision for early infancy appears to be in an even more precarious state, after the publication of two National Laws, namely:

Law n°131, 24 June 1983, which disadvantages day care centres, classifying them as provisions available on individual application, like public car parks;

Law n°40, 4 February 1989, which releases the State funds for the centres from the strict limitation laid down by Law n°1044, 6 December 1971, giving the Regions discretion to use State funding freely and thus creating the risk of an unjustified reduction in the quantity and quality of the provisions at a moment of crisis in the welfare state.

Nevertheless, we are not pessimistic about the future and destiny of Italian day care centres.
There are some facts which support our belief.
1) Some southern regions such as Campania and Sardinia, started refresher courses for care givers in order to improve their educational competence and raise their professional and economic level.
2) A region in northern Italy, Friuli- Venezia Giulia, has started a program of on-the-job training for care givers in order to enhance the educational quality of centres.
3)There is in Italy a large national association of care givers and supervisors of day care centres, and academic scholars who do research in the field of early childhood education; this association is the Coordinamento Nazionale degli asili nido. It will hold a meeting in the second week of May in order
- to exchange information,
-to discuss with representatives of the Parliament the dramatic political and economic problems of day care centres, and, above all,
-to confirm their willingness to continue their engagement in extrafamiliar education of infants and toddlers.